

UBBER
LAST

By Grace H. Boutelle

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ever since they had come to Perkins. De Peyster and his mother had to adjust their respective standards to a mutual harmony.

To begin with, it was spring. With the delicious odor of resinous smoke from the boughs that had banked the house, assailing one's nostrils, who could resist joining the dancing silhouettes that circled the bonfire and daring one's fate by leaping across it in swaggering competition as the flames died down?

But she drew lurid pictures of his certain fate if he should repeat the offense. Blind defiance rose insurgent within him—he would go! And then all of a sudden he remembered what his father said and hung his head to think how those grave, kind eyes of his would look at him now.

"Take good care of mamma," he had said at the last. "You must be her big brother and never let her worry about you, she's so little and delicate." And then he had whispered over two or three times, "My pretty little wife—my dear little girl!"

And De Peyster had tried with all his might to remember. But often it did seem as if it would have been a little easier if she could have understood that one was disgraced if one did not keep neck and neck with "the other fellows" in every prank they played.

There was a long and weary period of dooryard discipline after this episode. There were a good many times when De Peyster had to clinch his fists as tight as he could and remember his father very hard.

By and by June came, quivering with gold green sunlight, perfumed with a universal blossoming and pungent with the joy of living. At this time every true boy thrilled with the half realized rapture of it all and finds the fullest expression of his ecstasy in going swimming.

Every bright morning in some part of the town there was sure to be a group of boys toying a line, their necks bobbing eagerly forward and their bodies giving anticipatory jerks and twitches as they waited for the word. When the leader said "Go!" they darted forth, and there was a kaleidoscopic and dissolving view of legs racing madly down a side street that led to the river. Then collars came off, coats off, and as they ran with undiminished speed, the fellow who was far ahead sometimes slowing up with magnificent daring to get off his shoes and stockings while the others were still hampered by shirts and trousers, and by the time they tumbled in headlong competition over the bank the nimblest carried their entire wardrobe on their arms and dashed white into the water while the laggards fumbled at their shoe laces. The unfortunate who popped into the river, flushed and panting, after all the rest were in was greeted with taunting cries of: "Lubber last! Lubber last!"

De Peyster had never been told not to go in swimming. It had not occurred to his mother as among the list of his possible perils, as she was in blissful ignorance of the fact that "the other fellows" did it.

So it was with the thrilling exultance of the Greek runner that he set his toe on the line with the rest and hurled himself forward, head up and elbows in.

The first few rods it felt like flying. His feet scarcely seemed to touch the ground. Then a pair of legs flashed by him, and another and another. He gathered his strength and shot forward again, but another pair of legs went by, and another and another.

They were tearing off their coats; they were stripping off their shirts. He felt at his collar, wrenched it off and flung it away, to have both hands free for his coat and shirt. They were almost at the bank now. He could see Micky Daly's white skin dazzling in the sun as he took a splendid dive ahead of the rest. His own feet were growing heavy, and there was a mist before his eyes. The knot in his shoe lacing would not come untied. A savage rage filled him; if he could have cut off his foot to rid himself of the hampering shoe, he would scarcely have hesitated. You were ruled out if you went into the water with anything left on. As he struggled and perspired and agonized the two or three whom he had distanced leaped past him, and as he shook the shoe off at last and made his dive he heard the air ringing with, "Lubber last! Lubber last!" and slowly realized that it was meant for him.

He tried manfully two or three other days, but it was always the same way. His muscles were flabby from the dooryard discipline and he could not pick up in a few weeks what the others had acquired through joyous years of summer vagabondage.

He took it quietly and good naturedly, but it went deep.

His mother found out the custom shortly and forbade him to go near the water.

As for De Peyster himself, the numbness of despair settled upon him. Now he could never learn to redeem himself, to have some day perhaps the ineffable joy of being the first in, ahead of Jimmy Spratt, ahead of Micky Daly, ahead of everybody. His career was ended before it had begun.

"But I got to not let her worry," was the rueful conclusion he always reached. And then he breathed hard and winked fast.

Jimmy was his constant friend and brought him alleviating messages from time to time, such as that the other

tellers all said he had lots of sand and could do as well as the next teller if he had half a chance.

When even these encouraging remarks ceased to comfort, he gave his own horned toad as a last desperate resort. The effect was wonderfully efficacious, but transitory.

"I'd rather been a girl," said De Peyster many times to himself, "but I wish she didn't want to make believe I am one when I ain't."

This was the nearest to a reproof that he allowed his loyal little heart to entertain, but a baffled, unchildlike look grew in his eyes as he watched his mates go off without him day after day.

In July a light epidemic of scarlet fever prevailed. The oldest inhabitants called it "walking scarlatina," the illness was so slight.

Mrs. Van Voort kept De Peyster in the house.

One day De Peyster caught it.

He regarded it rather in the nature of a festal occurrence than otherwise, for all the boys who had had it came up to see him, and, although they were not allowed to stand long, it cheered him amazingly to hear what they were doing, for he had constantly the hope that these new delights they told of one after another would not be on the forbidden list when he was out again.

But after awhile he did not seem to care whether they came or not and one day when told that Micky Daly waited below said languidly, "I guess I don't care about seeing him just now—I'm sorta tired—but tell him it'll be bully to have him come tomorrow."

But when tomorrow came no one was admitted, for he was tossing about in a weakening struggle with something he did not understand that those who watched by him realized only too well.

He heard a voice as if from very far away:

"You'd better tell him, doctor," it said. "I can't stand it to see him fight for his life like a little Trojan when it isn't any use."

The voice broke and then went on: "He's a brave little chap, brave enough to face anything, and it isn't treating him square not to let him say goodby."

De Peyster opened his eyes. The doctor was standing over him.

"You don't have to tell me," said De Peyster, for he dimly saw that the old doctor's lips were quivering. "I—guess—I know."

He felt for his mother's hand.

"I'd like to hear you sing just once first, mamie," he said.

"There's a bully song one of the fellers taught me, 'One Wide River.' I've liked it especially much since—since it worried you to have me go in swimming."

His mother sobbed out a few lines, faltered and stopped.

A look of patient disappointment came over his face.

"Never mind, mamie, you needn't," he gasped. "I'm going to see it, you know, so it doesn't matter. Won't the cool water feel good, though? And don't you worry, mamie. Who's afraid? Father'll find me!"

He lay quite still a moment, then he whispered:

"I would a' liked to try one more run with the fellers—Micky Daly was most always ahead—he's a peach sprinter. Tell him and Jimmy and the other fellers about about me and the wide river. Tell 'em this time I—I ain't lubber last!"

And he slipped away to find that unknown river, the bravest of little pioneers.

What Wore His.

A friend once asked an aged man what caused him to complain so often at the end of pain and weariness. "Alas," replied he, "I have every day so much to do. I have two falcons to tame, two hares to keep from running away, two hawks to manage, a serpent to confine, a lion to chain and a sick man to tend and wait upon."

"Well, well," commented his friend, "you are busy indeed! But I didn't know that you had anything to do with a menagerie. How, then, do you make that out?"

"Why," continued the old man, "I listen. Two falcons are my eyes, which I must guard diligently; the two hares are my feet, which I must keep from walking in the ways of sin; the two hawks are my hands, which I must train to work, that I may provide for myself and those dependent on me as well as for a needy friend occasionally; the serpent is my tongue, which I must keep ever bridled lest it speak unseemly; the lion is my heart, with which I have a continual fight lest evil things come out of it, and the sick man is my whole body, which is always needing my watchfulness and care. All this daily wears out my strength."

In Perfect Accord.

Some years ago there came to an American city a delightful German, Herr von Blitz, who intended to support himself by giving lessons in his native tongue. When he had been here several months and had secured a moderate number of pupils, he went one day to the mother of one of them and to her great surprise asked for her daughter's hand in marriage.

"But, my dear sir," said she, "my daughter has no fortune."

The suitor smiled upon her in an expansive generosity.

"Me, too!" said he reassuringly.

"And, although we are not rich, we have thus far been able to give her every comfort. She is indeed used to luxury."

"Me, too!" was the smiling rejoinder. "But, Herr von Blitz, she will never be able to manage affairs."

"Me, too!" rejoiced the lover.

"And I feel obliged to tell you that my daughter has a very high temper."

"Me, too! Me, too!"

That was enough. The mother retired from the contest, and the professor won his suit.—Youth's Companion.

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